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# Confession, Hybridity, and Language in Gina Apostol's *Gun Dealers' Daughter*

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Gina Apostol's multiple languages are reflected in her experiences. She divides her time between New York, Massachusetts, and Manila, speaking English, Filipino<sup>1</sup>, and Waray in all locations, though she publishes her fiction only in English. Her *Gun Dealers' Daughter* (2012) was released in two nearly simultaneous editions in both the Philippines and United States. It won the Pen Open Book Award in 2013 in the United States. Its release in the Philippines followed her winning the Filipino National Book Award in 1997 and 2010 for her previous novels *Biolepsy* and *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, respectively. The worlds that Apostol inhabits emerge in *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, which takes place in numerous locales and over many decades, and it signifies a location of possible tensions among the Philippines and the United States. In particular, the novel contributes to current debates within the Philippines regarding development of Filipino English as distinct from American English.

Apostol creates a first-person narrator, Soledad Soliman, who is literally the daughter of a gun dealer prominent among the country's elite, including Dictator Ferdinand Marcos. The Filipino edition of the book bears images of coins on its cover, highlighting Apostol's concern with the economics of war and reminding readers of the economic toll that Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship had on the country. In the United States, by contrast, the book cover features an abstract image of a woman's face on both its hardbound and paperback versions, accentuating the novel's focus on Soledad's narrative voice and her plight, which is presumed to interest American readers more.

Soledad struggles between the privileged life she enjoys with parents who have benefitted from the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, and her own increasing knowledge of the injustices of his regime. She eventually joins a group of revolutionaries with an overtly anti-Marcos agenda. However, Soledad's experiences are never entirely free of ambivalence. She calls herself "a martial-law baby," referencing the declaration of martial law in 1972, which ensured that Marcos prolonged his reign over the Philippines (*Gun Dealers Daughter* 45-46). She also recalls spending part of her childhood hiding in the United States with her gun-dealing parents (45). However, most of her early life is spent in the Philippines, going with her parents to events at which they ingratiate themselves with members of the Marcos regime, the elite of the country.

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1. At present, there are no clear distinctions among the languages called Tagalog, Pilipino, and Filipino, and for the most part, these terms are used interchangeably to describe the dialect of Metro-Manila that is one of the official languages of the Republic of the Philippines. For the sake of clarity, I use "Filipino" because it is the term that aligns with most official documents regarding language.

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### Gina Apostol's Linguistic Codes

A writer and individual shaped by the interactions of Filipino and American cultural and linguistic influences, Gina Apostol sees herself as the site of manifold linguistic codes. Where several languages intersect, there is often fluctuation. In a 2010 interview with Daryll Delgado published in *Kritika Kultura*, Apostol reflects on the complexities of the creative process for a writer such as herself:

It is always my dilemma that I write in English. But I am always *myself* writing in English – that is, I am a Waray educated in Tagalog grammar writing in English. My speech is always multiple; I am always multiple; all of these tongues are always latent in me, simultaneously occurring; there is something obscene in the fact that English is the language that comes out, the language of surface. It's the language of the fuck-you, the imp of the perverse. It is obscene to write in English. Of course, writing in English is the sign of the perversions of our history, our mutilated selves. Writing in English is always a dagger in the heart, postcolonially. And yet why do I feel no guilt at all? Why does it make sense that I write in English? That is my dilemma. (293)

She emphasizes the word “*myself*” to show her connection to a multiplicity of languages and identities that reflects the larger cultural narrative of her native Philippines. English is the language she uses to manage her life not only when she lives in the United States but also when she conducts business near her home in Manila. Selfhood and nationhood split and converge among Filipino and American cultures, and Apostol sees how her own complex history, reflected in the larger history of the Philippines, is shaped by the colonizing forces of Spain and the United States and their imposition of the Spanish and English languages to socially shape the population.

Apostol deeply meditates in the interview on the cultural influences that form her identity and concludes that it is natural for her to write in English given the history of the language in the Philippines. However, English is problematic because it represents the imposition of an Americanized identity on her Filipina self, a conflict with which the narrator Soledad struggles throughout *Gun Dealers' Daughter*. As Homi Bhabha observes in *The Location of Culture* (1994): “It is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). Apostol's Filipino American identity is the space where she can begin to compose her multifaceted identity. She is more capable of navigating the interstices of her multiple homes and languages than the narrator she creates. Apostol is in a position to evaluate the English language's value as integral to her identity while problematic because she recognizes her own identity as already multifaceted. She is able to write resistant fiction through the use of English, employing the language in its capacity as “the language of the fuck-you,” but also recognizing that the English language can divorce her and other Filipinas from the indigenous influences that might also help them to define themselves. On the other hand, Soledad is hindered from seeing herself as having the multiple identities many others could experience from having lived in the Philippines and in the United States. Therefore, Soledad only becomes a more integrated self once she has begun to accept the Filipina aspects of herself in combination with her American upbringing.

Apostol inextricably links identity and translation, particularly for the heroine of *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, who is lost in spaces where she cannot translate or understand the

Filipino language that is being spoken around her. Apostol reconciles the differences among two or more languages used by a single person in her linguistic repertoire by showing that, for Soledad and herself, something is already lost when they translate the myriad ideas and cognitive processes of thought into meaningful text. Deeply mindful of history's influence in creating contemporary citizens who constantly translate their ideas into several languages, she summarizes her view of the Filipina self after the end of Spanish and American control in the Philippines:

The fact that we are translated is what is true of ourselves. I imagine that this is the postcolonial crux. We exist as translated beings, footnotes within footnotes, grasped only by a series of meditations, braid upon braid of voices with relentless multiplicity—and in this way we symbolize what is human. (293)

Apostol's mix of languages informs her writing in *Gun Dealers' Daughter* leading to a text that reflects multiple languages and identities. She reconciles with and accepts a Filipino history characterized by linguistic variety among Filipinos, and a colonial history that brought Spanish, English, and even Japanese into the mix. Her inability to change the role that history and colonial and cross-cultural contacts have played on her languages makes Apostol willing to embrace English as a mode of communication since translation has become fundamental to the Filipina self. She asserts her own identities and languages in her personal linguistic mix, and by extension in the languages of the characters she creates.

### **Narrative Style, Trauma, and Fragmentation in *Gun Dealers' Daughter***

*Gun Dealers' Daughter* relies on its characters' cognizance of place and social situation as Apostol creates a narrative style that reflects the personal and political tensions among various identities and individuals that survive the Marcos era. The heroine Soledad is the culmination of these conflicts, a young woman who is often thrust into the inconsistent solace of her own mind by clashes between family and self, between whether her national allegiance is to the Philippines or to the United States, and social structures that still regard her as a child despite her burgeoning maturity.

As narrator, Soledad frequently employs a self-mocking tone to highlight how she and other characters cope with difficult realities, such as the linguistic alienation she feels due to her limited knowledge of Filipino. Apostol highlights her cultural and emotional disconnection from the people she encounters outside of her family and the people of Manila struggling under the fascist dictatorship in which she and her parents are complicit. In the fascist dictatorship that developed in the Philippines after 1972, most people were traumatized by the sudden legal changes that affected everyone through increased police presence and brutality towards the populace. In *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, Apostol recognizes how people relied on humor to cope with poverty and political hardships.

Moments of humor mark Apostol's narrative and lighten the tone of an otherwise dark text. In introducing a minor character, Ka Noli, Apostol's narrative remarks that he "looked like no Italian cookie," punning on "cannoli" (130). When Soledad recounts a revolutionary meeting interrupted by her grandmother, she says the group was found "*in medias res* (but in *medyas*, no)" (131); a pun on the Filipino word for house-slippers, which points out that revolutionaries are not conforming to the older generation's social

norm of wearing shoes indoors. These puns highlight Apostol's skill in writing humor, but particularly in the latter pun, reveal her skill at code-switching to create in-jokes for her Filipino audience.

Dark humor is visible in the tone of the first few lines of *Gun Dealers' Daughter* which seem very serious, hooking readers of historical fiction who expect the brutality of Ferdinand Marcos to be revealed in the book. This initial tone is deliberately misleading as Apostol shapes the narrative to include mundane or humorous moments throughout. She opens the novel by introducing the narrator, Soledad, arriving in France with her hands bandaged, feeling disoriented (3). Photographers and their blinding flashbulbs pester her, suggesting she is some kind of celebrity (3-4). However, Apostol soon reveals that there is a commercial photo shoot occurring that has nothing to do with the narrator (3). Her grim moment of arrival is trivialized by the flow of commerce, and she realizes that her image will end up on a cutting room floor, while the image of models used to sell "condoms or perfume" will be treasured (4). Apostol juxtaposes the apparently traumatized narrator with her hands mysteriously bandaged and a consumerist reality that is the basis of world economics. The photographers see her as an irritation and are far more interested in selling a product than in her spectacle. The scene prepares readers for the gradual discovery that Soledad is not a prominent figure at all, not in her family as the "gun dealers' daughter," not within the elite world that her parents inhabit, and not among the Filipino populace. Her sense of being a superfluous outsider permeates every group she enters. Apostol is diminishing the role of her narrator to show that Soledad, though apparently the novel's heroine, is not heroic, significant, or valuable in the conflict between the Marcos regime and the Filipino people.

Apostol employs several narrative devices to show that her narrator is one of the most marginal figures in the fictional world of 1980s Manila. Her level of self-importance is disproportionate to the manner in which others see her, and so she is deluded into thinking that her role in a revolutionary plot is significant: "I suppose it's true of anyone whipped into the eye of a busy, seething project (let's call it), no matter how it was one got there. You feel your confidence level is up – then that superman, Nietzschean, egomongering stuff comes later" (203). Apostol ironically juxtaposes Soledad's casting of herself as a super-human entity with her actual diminutive role, since the plot of which Soledad speaks takes place largely without her participation, and ultimately without her having to take responsibility for it in any public forum. Soledad's thoughts make her appear vacuous and preoccupied with a sense of how her actions appear to others rather than self-reflective or actively working for change. The narrative focalizes her minor crises, while events with significance to the world outside of her experience occur at the margins of her perceptions. Yet, Apostol gives Soledad a radical urge to link her own experiences to famous important people and to political change.

The author thus appears to mock Soledad throughout *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, emphasizing her narcissism and myopia. As she gets further entrenched in revolutionary designs, for instance, readers might expect Soledad to experience ambivalence toward her familial duties as the daughter of Marcos' friends and associates. Instead, Apostol characterizes her experience as comical melodrama. When her father is vilified in a meeting, for instance, she thinks: "I guess I should ... join the crucifiers of Pampanga and lash my body to a bloody cross, at the mere sound of my father's name" (97). The cultural reference to Pampanga is underscored by its infamy as a taboo act. For many westerners, the people who show their religious beliefs by voluntarily dragging crosses through the streets and piercing their flesh with Christ-like nail wounds may appear to be a symbol

of the perceptively backward, quaintly wild Filipinos who other, more “civilized,” societies heartily disdain. Soledad aligns with those who mock the crucifiers to an extent, seeing little value in their actions, but she also views them as participating in a profound, culturally-relevant sacrifice. Apostol mixes Soledad’s melodramatic perception of guilt with a sense of responsibility; Soledad believes she has an obligation to participate in a distinctively Filipino method of atonement for her guilt, but realizes that her own distance from Filipino society cannot permit such a display. Apostol’s description of Soledad’s situation is so inflated that it cannot be tragic. Soledad will not drag a cross through town and get nailed to it, and so readers cannot sympathize with her in this instance because she has exaggerated her plight to absurd levels, even highlighting the gulf of privilege between herself and the common people of the Philippines.

Apostol subverts readers’ expectations, creating an alienating space for them that emulates Soledad’s confusion and which ultimately results in an unpleasant deluge of facts at the end of the book. Further highlighting Soledad’s supreme myopia, Apostol reduces her treatment of the fates of her fellow revolutionaries to the last two pages of the book in an authorial move that also displays Soledad’s inadequacy as a narrator and heroine. Ka Noli, a prominent member of the peoples’ struggle against the dictatorship, has evaded capture and may be the subject of an art project juxtaposing rebels with socialites (290-291). Jed, Soledad’s lover, has immigrated to America and is continuing his life after his revolutionary deeds (291). Like Soledad, Jed comes from a privileged family and has avoided any actual punishment for his role in resisting Marcos. In contrast, Soledad’s friend and foil, the radical activist Soledaridad, dies after being mutilated and tortured by a Filipino anti-insurgency soldier (291-292). Soledad, like Jed, avoids persecution and punishment and is able to leave the Philippines for a relatively calm life in the United States distant from the revolutionary acts in which she was a participant because of her high status as a member of the Filipino aristocracy. In tacking on these brief glimpses of their fates, Apostol is reminding her readers that Soledad is distant from these revolutionary events. The narrator’s role in rebellion is largely a matter of her own perception rather than an actual one, but she experiences guilt at being fortunate enough to have survived in relative comfort outside the Philippines, and her safety engenders an emotional trauma of its own.

*Gun Dealers’ Daughter* delineates signs Soledad suffers from an isolating mental illness like Borderline Personality Disorder to reinforce its dark tone through an unreliable narrative form. Soledad, the narrator, often manifests symptoms of major mental disorders such as decreased concentration and memory, compulsive behavior, paranoia, confusion, and suicide attempts. She reacts to situations in seemingly inappropriate ways, giggling at the sight of her own menstrual blood while observing it with an obsessive preoccupation (91). Further, she is unclear about many details of her memoir, calling a servant named Eremita by Soledad’s own alias of Victoria Eremita in moments that almost seem dissociative (16, 147-148). Apostol uses Soledad’s bizarre reactions and confusion to render the narrative less coherent for the reader, who quickly begins to question the narrator’s reliability.

Only at the novel’s end, however, does the reader realize that Soledad’s signs of mental illness are in response to the trauma of living in the shadow of her nation’s history and of having “survivor’s guilt” in relation to the Marcos’ regime. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra explains the traumatic influence of a colonial power over the colonized who are “haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past

returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop" (21). LaCapra asserts trauma's role in coloring the sufferer's sense of the future. Apostol shows that even those in privileged positions can suffer from the contradictions and violence of history. Soledad's trauma is discernible as an inability to express herself. She is lost in her split loyalties, uncertain of the extent of her allegiance to Filipinos and to Marcos. She is angry about the legacy of colonialism in the Philippines, particularly as the United States effectively ignores human rights abuses in order to maintain a productive commercial and military alliance, but she recognizes that she directly benefits economically and socially from this legacy and from the dictator himself.

Apostol uses Soledad's narrative voice to reveal the common perception among scholars of Filipino history that their history has been written for them by Europeans and Americans. She also provides a rationale for making Soledad an unreliable narrator, since Soledad attempts to shape her own nationalistic identity through reading historical works but notes that the books are limited since they are not written by Filipino historians:

I discovered that our books of history were invariably in the voice of the colonist, the one who misrecognized us. We were inscrutable apes engaging in implausible insurrections against gun-wielding epic heroes who disdained our culture but wanted our land. The simplicity and rapacity of *their* reductions were consistent. (122)

Soledad recognizes that she has shaped her life up to this point in order to fulfill the role that Europeans and Americans wrote into her history by ingratiating herself with the Marcos regime. She tries to move in two different spheres, the world of the Filipino elite and the realm of the revolutionaries, while never being wholly part of either. Her membership in both groups implies that she has the ability to speak for both, but her obvious lack of understanding of either world is apparent in her inability to speak at all in those worlds. Her words are blocked by her traumatic position, and her inability to envision a future free from that trauma leads her to live elsewhere. In creating this dynamic, Apostol challenges the reader to question not only the colonizers' voices already under scrutiny in most post-colonial countries, but also Soledad's own role in terms of authoring her story which cannot be interpreted as a story of the Filipino people because she seems so alienated from them.

To further undermine Soledad's reliability as a narrator, Apostol has other characters explicitly mock her. Soledad reflects that one of the revolutionaries, Edwin, taunts her: "*Sol*, he said: *short for solipsism*" (76), implying Soledad's extreme egocentrism made evident by her inability to see the inequalities and suffering of the world that surrounds her. However, Soledad's trauma limits her ability to recognize the world beyond what LaCapra calls the "melancholic feedback loop." She is so deeply embedded in her traumatic narrative that her station in society reinforces feelings of guilt which she cannot overcome.

Soledad's guilt paralyzes her again when her political friend Solidaridad calls a room in Soledad's house a "spoliarium" (56) because she interprets Soledad's parents' wealth as the "spoils of war." Soledad corrects her: "That is the arena of gladiator corpses in ancient Rome ... A solarium is a sunroom" (56). To this, Solidaridad counters: "The place of spolia ... Spoliarium" (57). Solidaridad is sincere about the revolutionary cause and interprets Soledad's parents' wealth as rightfully belonging to the Filipino people.

Soledad is rendered silent by her feelings of guilt again, and cannot deny her parents' role in perpetuating the power of Marcos and his dictatorship. Later, another character even acts as a voice for Soledad's traumatic conscience. Soledad refers to her parents as "traders" only to be misheard by a fellow student as calling them "traitors" (133), highlighting the perpetual sense she has that her guilt is justifiable and therefore insurmountable. Soledad's parents are betraying the Filipino people with their gun dealing trade, and the pun is both clever and stinging while simultaneously marking Soledad as an outsider.

Even characters that seem closest to Soledad do not often represent her identity in a positive light, further reinforcing Apostol's casting of Soledad as unreliable, egocentric, and deeply ambivalent. In one instance, Apostol relies again on a pun to illustrate Soledad's ineffectuality when her mother Reina Elena confuses terms about her daughter's intent to study history: "Our business has nothing to do with you. Just become a scholar of histrionics and go to Harvard Law School" (159). Just two chapters earlier, Reina Elena says: "You will stick to your studies in America, become a historical scholar, and leave us to our business" (144). The phrases parallel each other, suggesting that Soledad will study in America and that she will not be involved in the family trade. Notably, however, one sees Soledad as a "historical" scholar while the other uses the word "histrionics." Soledad's irrational and often theatrical behavior warrants the latter vivid title, even if the error is merely a case of misspeaking on her mother's part. Apostol uses the pun to again emphasize Soledad's appearance to others in the narrative; her traumatic experience is intrinsic to the way she relates to the world, but she emerges to others as a hysterical individual with a warped understanding of history.

To some extent, Soledad truly is "a scholar of histrionics," since she is prone to fainting in overwhelming situations and has made at least one suicide attempt. The novel's message is premised on the idea that she is the heroine but she is not at all heroic. By the end of the novel, it is clear that she has managed to avoid the suffering of her namesake Solidaridad and has abandoned the Philippines and its political troubles. To outsiders, she enjoys her social position and reiterates her boyfriend Jed's assertion of their privilege: "We live outside the country's rules. We can do whatever we want. We can commit crimes. We can even play at revolution. We could even kill people, for all we knew. And in the end we will always get away" (138). Soledad escapes punishment at the end of the novel, and her actions indirectly cause the deaths of others, reinforcing Jed's belief that they can get away with killing people. Naturally, her trauma continues to torment her, and she subjects herself to self-inflicted injuries that require the bandages she wears in the novel's first scene. Recognizing that her status provides immunity from punishment, Soledad's inevitable guilt stupefies her, and so her dramatic attempts at self-harm fulfill the histrionics to which her mother inadvertently alludes.

Apostol renders Soledad silent at significant moments in the book to highlight her inability to convey her thoughts coherently, thus undermining her abilities as a narrator and reinforcing her traumatic inner-monologue. Soledad returns again and again to her failure to convey meaning through her words, describing it as a struggle with the ineffable emerging from trauma. Early in the novel after her suicide attempt, she observes of her hospitalization:

Worse was my recurring, miserable dysgraphia, a slip-sliding dementia of letters, an almost untenable mental pit. I could write, if I wished, bleak, simple sentences,

many of them at a time, and it became my hobby, my way of staring at things, trying to get them right. (9)

In this passage, she claims language is taken from her, mirroring the colonial influence of the United States on Filipino language. Soledad's inability to write parallels the effects on a language of continuous conquest, like the influence of Spanish and later English over Filipino languages. She could be referring to a form of postcolonial trauma and its displacement of identity which engenders this process of rediscovering language when it has been taken. Yet, she also describes her own emergent language as "bleak" and "simple," and the narrative also hints that she is playing a role for her doctors, reenacting a kind of colonized aping of linguistic structures, which her foreign doctors expect. Soledad poses no threat and instills no fear in the doctors who treat her after she attempts to kill herself.

Apostol has the character Soledad continuously observe that she is being spoken for rather than exerting her own voice to further the sense that Soledad represents a kind of silencing. Doctors and nurses frequently describe her actions and progress as good, and Soledad recounts: "Humbly, joyfully, I acknowledged her praise, without language of my own" in speaking of one of her nurses (10). Writing too becomes an important part of Soledad's recovery, but the first things she writes are unintelligible because she is struggling to find a voice that has been effectively silenced by her trauma. As a result, all she can manage to write are lists: "I began to scrawl effortlessly, abominably, words that came to me from thin air. *Pendulously. Ruminant. Versification.* Things I snatched from the window breeze. *Scrofulous. Milieu. Duchess of Malfi*" (13). She writes not to describe her environment, but just writes down words associated with her past education, even including the title of a tragic play she must have read in her American school. She is trying to please the doctors and nurses, her new authority figures: "I wished to be good; I wished the nurses to say, *bon, bon*" (13). She gains approval through the use of language that she believes will please others, and rather than making independent speech acts, she parrots other people. In this instance, Soledad responds to her colonized inability to communicate by reinforcing a paradigm in which she is a colonized citizen who needs an authority figure to approve of her. Apostol renders Soledad increasingly childlike, needing approval from her caregivers because Soledad is regressing into her "melancholic feedback loop," indulging memories of her traumatic past to the detriment of her sense of the future.

### ***Gun Dealers' Daughter's Linguistic Codes***

Apostol frames Soledad's life between her silent arrival at an airport and her final acknowledgement of the fates of her friends to highlight the role that language plays in her ability to reconcile herself to her life's events. Soledad's displacement of identity, her sense of being an outsider, a superfluous figure, and even a mentally ill patient are all represented linguistically in the novel. A useful approach to understanding Apostol's exploration of the linguistic displacements that represent Soledad's overall disorientation is Mark Sebba's views on code-switching which operates as a means to highlight social and political affiliations (2). For instance, Soledad experiences frequent disorientation and exclusion because of her lack of proficiency in Filipino. Her disorientation works as a metaphor for the changing linguistic, cultural, and political realities in which she and the other characters live. The first-person narrative disorients readers with linguistic



references that reflect Soledad's position within mutually irreconcilable socio-political worlds.

Language reinforces a character's social position within *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, frequently showing the sociocultural and political groups to which individuals belong that reinforce individual characterizations. Soledad remarks that her mother "spoke the language of power, Imelda's mournful Waray" (89), explicitly linking her mother to the first Lady Imelda Marcos who is also from the Visayas region. Soledad's mother, Reina Elena, uses the term "inday" to refer to her daughter consistently throughout the text, a word of clearly Waray-Waray origin that is affectionately used to refer to women. By using "inday," Reina Elena shows affection for her daughter, while also demonstrating their relationship to her particular cultural and linguistic origins and broader mix of Filipino life.

When their relationship becomes strained because of Soledad's involvement against her parents' business and the Marcos regime, Reina Elena abandons the term "inday" to show her disapproval and calls her daughter "Sol" instead (268-270). While, at first "Sol" does not appear to be less affectionate than "inday," elsewhere in the novel Apostol uses the term to create distance, as when Edwin calls "Sol" short for "solipsism," (76). Sol's impact is limited particularly in terms of her influence on others. Reina Elena dominates the conversation with her daughter in their home's front hall, slaps her into silence and berates her for betrayal of the family:

"Silence, Sol, silence! What will I do with you? Shut up! Idiot! *Ingrata!* After all we do for you, this is what I get? We work hard all our lives for you—and this is what we get? Lita! What are you staring at? Get away from here! I told you to get the doctor—get away!" (269)

Before this event happens, though, she refers to her daughter as "ingrata," a Spanish term that carries with it the weight and prestige of having been the language of a former colonial power in the Philippines. It stands out enough from the English that is being spoken to make it a noteworthy insult. It further sets Reina Elena apart in terms of prestige from the English- and Filipino-speaking servants who are witnessing the events. Yet, it is easy to see that Reina Elena's anger is only for public show, a way to protect her image as leader of her household because she addresses not only Soledad but also Lita, a household servant. After Reina Elena sends the servant from the room, Soledad trips and her mother comforts her: "Inday"—I heard her in my ear—"you have to leave us" (270). In *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, language reveals tensions among individuals, particularly along class lines. When the members of the household perceive that Reina Elena's matriarchal role at the head of the family is threatened, she insults her daughter with a pointed Spanish-derived term while the servants are around, but returns to her affectionate "inday" when she no longer has an audience. She behaves as a woman of her class is expected to behave in the view of others, but is a worried mother once no one else can see her.

Apostol provides other scenes that similarly deploy language distinctions to highlight the power relations which create a highly stratified society within the Philippines. For the lower-class characters, Solidaridad and Soledad's family's driver Manong Babe, their shared sociocultural origins are expressed linguistically when they discover they are both from Leyte in the Visayas. Manong Babe shows his camaraderie with Solidaridad through the statement: "I used to drive a Jeepney there—*binulan*" (170).

Solidaridad has fluency in both Filipino and English, and Manong Babe could have easily said “buwanan” or “monthly,” but he chooses to use the Waray term “binulan,” which transports Solidaridad back to her childhood in Leyte. She even responds with a statement about her childhood: “Who knows? I could have ridden your jeep when I was little” (170), which further heightens their sense of belonging. Soledad is denied entry into this discussion because of her lack of knowledge in Waray-Waray, though her mother is from the same region as Solidaridad and Manong Babe. Soledad recognizes the sounds of Waray-Waray though they have no concrete meaning to her, except perhaps where they resemble Filipino words. Readers infer that with more fluency in Waray-Waray she might feel more connected to the Philippines, but her mother chose to encourage her daughter’s fluency in English instead to ensure Soledad’s position and sense of belonging among the Filipino elite who associate English and the United States with cultural and financial superiority.

The conversation between Solidaridad and Manong Babe illuminates the cohesion that most characters enjoy with almost everyone they meet. It reinforces a sense of nationalism through linguistic diversity because they have multiple communicative codes available to them across the Philippines. Solidaridad, for instance, participates in what Ralph Fasold calls a “dense social network” or a group that knows her and the languages she speaks well (235-236). Her dense social network is characterized by Filipino revolutionaries who reinforce her identity by preferring the same language. One member of this group, Ka Noli has a mastery of Filipino and English and therefore the ability to interact fluidly in multiple circles as Apostol pointedly tells readers about his skill in code-switching:

He spoke in a dexterous mix of Tagalog and English, street talk, and on his tongue it seemed more vigorous than either language; he made stray comments, mostly jokes, in the way, among Filipinos, an easy familiarity arises among people who see someone again to whom they are related, though they barely know them. (187)

Apostol explicitly situates Ka Noli in the streets of Manila representing the Filipino populace. Attuned to the people he encounters, he defines the actualities of life in the Philippines rather than abstract or intellectual ideals of the nation. He has Filipino mannerisms and ways of speaking, and he interacts with his friends in public places, like a coffee shop in Metro Manila. As Jed pesters him, he tells him: “Cool *ka lang*” (187). In this phrase, “ka” is second-person, so he is making clear whom he is addressing. “Lang” means “just” or “simply,” so the phrase mixes English and Filipino, telling his friend to “Just cool it.” To reiterate, Ka Noli says: “Cool it, *makulit*,” drawing in the Filipino “makulit,” meaning “annoying” which points out Jed’s aggravating behavior (187), while functioning as a pun on “cool it.” Most striking, however, is his choice to tell him to “*Relaks*” (187). Derived from the English word “relax,” which would have entered the Filipino lexicon after the United States took control of the Philippines from Spain, the word “relaks” instead of “relax” stands out as a Filipino assimilation of English rather than the reverse. Apostol presents Ka Noli as a character who belongs in the Philippines because he draws on multiple linguistic forces in his conversations, comfortable with a mix of Spanish, English, and Filipino to reinforce his own identity as a postcolonial Filipino. His friend speaks to him largely in English, a sign of wealth and education; Ka Noli is trying to get him to relax, not in the way an elitist might, but rather to “relaks” as though he is among the mainstream populace that surrounds him. Ka Noli chooses the

linguistic hybrid “relaks” over the more traditional Filipino term “mamahinga,” displaying his fluidity in applying appropriate codes to his situation, and subtly reminding Jed to behave according to the cultural codes necessitated by their locale, a café in which many different kinds of people interact with different degrees of assimilation into mainstream Filipino life.

Juxtaposed with the fluid, effortless hybrid speech of Ka Noli, Soledad’s interactions with language often leave her disoriented, revealing her trauma while solidifying her place as an outsider in every interaction. When she attends her first day of college and meets her future friend and ally against Marcos, Solidaridad. Soledad’s sense of being an outsider through her lack of proficiency in specifically Filipino languages is clear from her interpretation of events. Filipino is an encrypted sequence rather than a functional language to Soledad. Her limited skill in Filipino distances Soledad from her ability to see herself as fully a part of Filipino society, since Filipino is spoken prevalently among the people who surround her while she remains ignorant of it. Drawn to Filipino because she is drawn to Filipino ideals, she is simultaneously repulsed by her ineptitude in the language her parents have encouraged her to see as inferior to English. She creates a correlation between understanding Filipino culture and fluency in Filipino. She worries that she is betraying her identity as an individual of Filipino heritage because she can only understand Filipino texts and speech translated into English. And alienated equally from the world of her parents, Soledad falls into a disorienting space between the two worlds.

Soledad’s distance from both the revolutionary world that she tries to inhabit and the elite world into which she is born is contrasted by the proximity of Solidaridad to her Filipino world; her sense of belonging is revealed through her fluency in both Filipino and English. When they meet, Soledad reflects on her inability to understand even simple words in Filipino: “It was awful to recognize that when Soli first addressed me I had no idea what she was talking about, and all she was saying was hello” (80-81). Solidaridad prefers to use “takayo,” a word with Spanish origins that has been integrated into Filipino, to Soledad’s English “eponym,” asserting her place among the people of the Philippines while Soledad stands firmly outside this boundary. Solidaridad treats Soledad as if she is deaf, yelling when Soledad does not respond immediately to her Filipino word and further asserting Soledad’s place outside the Filipino world. When Soledad finally responds to Solidaridad, it is in educated English that seems condescending:

“Ah. You’re my eponym,” I said, like an ass.

“No,” she countered. “You are mine.”

“Solidaridad Soledad,” I read slowly.

“So-le-dad So-li-man,” she mimicked. “We rhyme without reason, ha-ha.” (81)

Solidaridad responds to Soledad’s elitist term “eponym” with self-assertion. She refutes the idea that she is the source of Soledad’s name, reinforcing the notion that Soledad cannot derive her identity from the Filipino world. Solidaridad concludes that their similar names are a coincidence, but Soledad takes their similarities to heart to the point of inflicting wounds on herself later when she hears of Solidaridad’s torture and subsequent death.

As though her fluency in Filipino were not enough to prove she was entrenched in Filipino culture, Solidaridad explains that her name derives from a famous revolutionary work that shaped Filipino history. A revolutionary newsletter first

published in 1889, *La Solidaridad* was the first important text that spurred the Filipino War of Independence, the conflict that Soledad defends to the American colonel. While Soledad's knowledge of events is limited to a knee-jerk nationalistic perspective that insists Filipinos did not need the intervention of the United States to become an independent nation, *Solidaridad* proves she has studied the texts enough to know their significance:

"Soli, Noli, Fili. You know. The holy trinity. The sacred texts of the revolution. *La Solidaridad*, the journal of the propagandists of the 1880s. No? *Noli Me Tangere*? Rizal's first novel. *Fili* was the second. What? Does not ring a bell?" (81).

The nationalistic texts that *Solidaridad* lists include *Noli Me Tangere* by Filipino national hero José Rizal who published his scathing satire in Spanish in 1887. The text exposed the injustices that the Spanish clergy perpetrated while they were in power. Translated into Filipino and English, *Noli Me Tangere* is still compulsory reading for high school students in the Philippines, and Soledad would have read it had she not studied abroad for so long. *Noli Me Tangere*'s sequel *El Filibusterismo* was banned for its representations of the injustices of the Spanish government. The Spanish government executed Rizal in 1896 because of his books and associations with revolutionary organizations, but his works helped to spur a tide of nationalistic sentiment in the country, leading to the foundation of revolutionary groups like the *Katipunan* in 1892. Led by fellow Filipino national hero Andrés Bonifacio, they engendered the Filipino Revolution against Spanish rule. In *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, Apostol gives *Solidaridad* knowledge of Filipino history to highlight her "solidarity" with the Filipino people and to contrast her with the isolated "Sol" or "Soledad," who represents a Filipino version of American individualism and the divide between the isolated elite that supported Marcos and the people whom Marcos governed. *Solidaridad*'s name also shows her fluency in Spanish as well as in Filipino and English and asserts her position as an individual who is the integrated product of multiple colonial and indigenous influences.

Conversely, Soledad's reliance on the English language emerges from a society marked by conquest and having a history of changing national languages. Language is problematic and even dangerous for Soledad, which the novel's beginning and end highlight with their focus on her trauma through a linguistic lens: "Language plays its part ... above all, words are symptoms. I must be alert. Even one's vocabulary could be a crime ... Words have their own way with you: be careful" (14). In these mysterious observations, Apostol makes Soledad incapable of finding a language to claim as her own that is not an exercise of authority or lack of agency. Words are cast as perilous and as "symptoms" of a larger illness concerning agency and self-hood, conveying the extent to which Soledad never finds a tenable voice throughout most of the novel.

Only confession redeems Soledad, and her first-person narrative is a kind of memoir of selfhood, a form of translating herself in order to overcome her individual trauma and reconcile herself to her complicity in the Marcos regime, the rebellion against it, and *Solidaridad*'s death. Soledad must find a language through which she can convey truths about herself. Challenging the doctors' perspective on language, Soledad says, "*is it not so, that it is language that will save me?* This work I am doing right now could become a hesitant, crepitating – *talambuhay*? A reckoning. A confession" (15). For the benefit of the doctor who has asked her to write in order to recover from her suicide attempts, she refers to her writing as "hesitant" and "crepitating," suggesting that the *talambuhay* itself

might be inadequate, perhaps because of its origin in trauma, but she translates the word into two terms, beginning to think of herself in terms of a hybrid identity. Beginning, at last, to reconcile the Filipino- and English-speaking facets of her identity, her change into a more integrated hybrid self, however, occurs only after she has inadvertently caused the misfortunes and even deaths of others. It is a heavy price to pay, and Apostol provides no easy answer or closure, but in finally acknowledging the multiple aspects of herself through confession, Soledad perhaps finds her way out of trauma, disorientation, and illness at last, accepting that language works to her benefit in the form of truth-telling that overcomes the suffering emerging from her inability to recognize her own fluidity in an authentic linguistic and cultural mix.

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